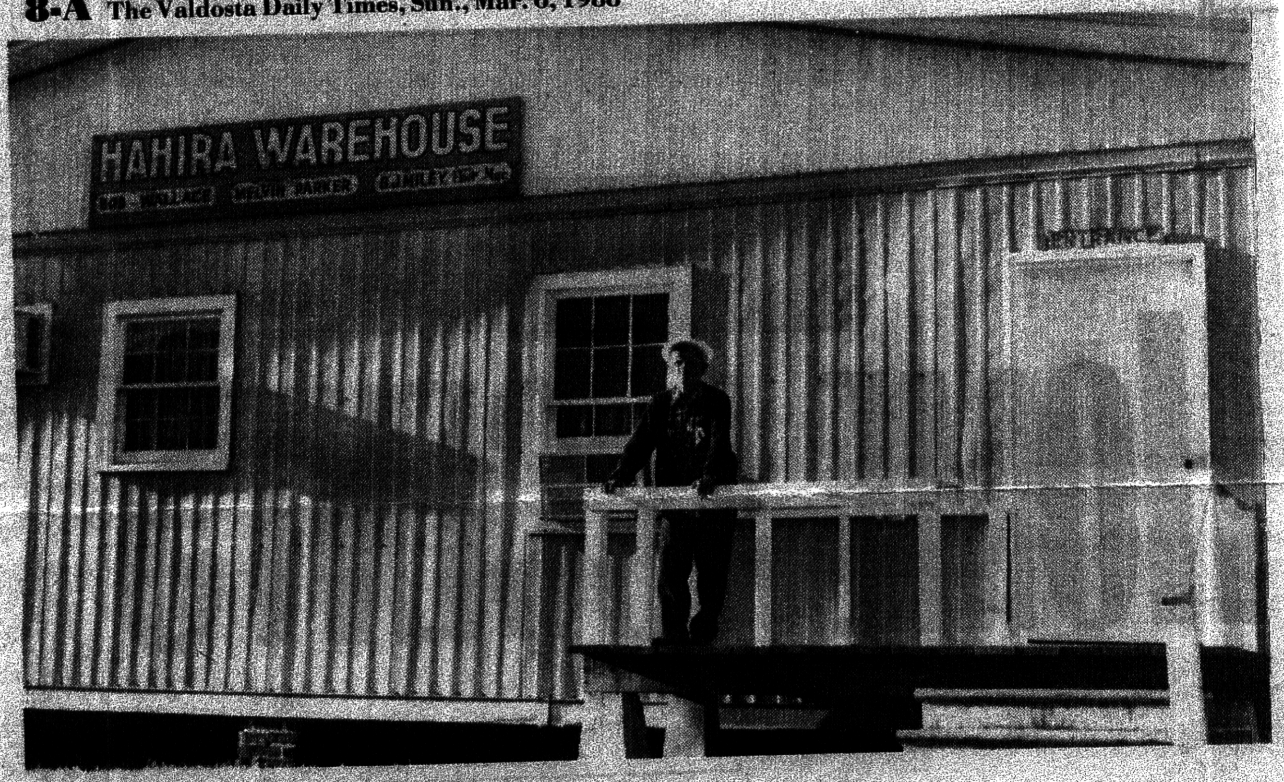

Miley Stands In Front Tobacco Warehouse He Helped Build, Worked In

Hahira Tobacco Warehouser Remembers South Ga. Start

By KATHLEEN McCROCKLIN
Times Staff Writer

HAHIRA — "I've hauled enough fertilizer to put a dam across the Mississippi River and I've built enough tobacco flues to extend from here to California," said B.J. Miley.

Miley has watched the Hahira tobacco growing and auction season since 1923 when the first warehouse in the area was built and the first crop grown. His life has revolved around the Hahira tobacco season.

The 83-year-old man came to Hahira from a rural area when he was one-year-old.

"I've done a lot of hard work in my life," Miley said smiling, remembering the year he hauled lumber in a Model-T truck from a nearby saw mill to help build a Hahira warehouse.

After helping with construction of the warehouse, Miley hauled fertilizer from a Valdosta business to area growers because most did not have trucks or cars.

Miley remembers how tobacco growing started in Hahira.

"We were all new in this. Nobody knew what they were doing," Miley said, laughing.

Demonstrators from North Carolina

Grandson Jimmy Miley is floor manager now and will see his grandfather's face out of the hundreds of growers, buyers and warehouse employees who are present at the yearly auction.

Miley is excited about this year's auction.

"Yes, sir. I'm ready to go," he said, laughing.

Miley remembers the lean years in tobacco.

"The worst year they ever had was in '32. They didn't operate but one house here in 1932. Tobacco was bringing in ten cents a pound. They got by some way. That's when blue mold got on the plants and killed them. There was very little money made," Miley said.

Miley said among the changes he has seen over the years in tobacco is the use of wood furnace-operated tobacco barns, which use flues, to the use of modern bulk barns.

Tobacco is now cured in barns where tobacco is laid on racks and the barn has vents to allow heat in. Bulk barns have thermostats which regulate temperature.

Some farmers still use the older method of hanging tobacco from the barn ceiling where a furnace brings heat into pipes filtered through flues.

floor activities during auction time.

Miley sits in his chair and reflects on the changes in tobacco growing and selling over the years. He is chewing the product of his life's work.

"I used to chew it. I went to eating it," Miley jokes.

"He chews from the time he gets up in the morning until the time he goes to bed," Mrs. Miley said, laughing.

"I don't know if people will keep smoking it. I don't know if it will last. There will be some people to grow it," Miley said. "People have discussed ways to keep them from smoking it you know. Cancers and all."

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Demonstrators from North Carolina and Kentucky came to Hahira in the early 1920s to show farmers how to grow and crop tobacco.

"They helped them and showed them how to do it all and then they would get a percentage of it when the crop was made," Miley explained.

Miley and his wife, Mabel, bought a farm in 1940. But Miley enjoyed his job as Hahira Warehouse floor manager more than the growing end of the business.

The crowds and excitement of auction time draw him year after year.

Miley was floor manager from the 1920s to 1983. He had to retire in 1983 due to a heart condition, Mrs. Miley said.

But the family tradition in tobacco continues.

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Some farmers still use the older method of hanging tobacco from the barn ceiling where a furnace brings heat into pipes filtered through flues. Temperature had to be consistently monitored under the old method. Miley remembers many days when he would hammer out the flat metal into cylinders for flues.

"It's just changed from what it used to be. Different ways of handling it and different ways of growing it," Miley said.

Miley has lived in Lowndes County his entire life but worked the Kentucky burley markets in the 1930s in Horse Cave, Ky.

Mrs. Miley remembers hearing her husband's truck drive by late at night as she held her daughter, Barbara, then a baby, and rocked her to sleep. Mrs. Miley said Miley worked hard at all hours of the day and night making flues, hauling fertilizer or supervising

the changes in tobacco growing and selling over the years. He is chewing the product of his life's work.

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